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Under one roof

by Clayton Trutor

Peter Fritzsche begins the final paragraph of *Hitler's First Hundred Days* with an astute observation about the psychological allure of the new Nazi regime. "The great achievement of the Third Reich," he writes, "was getting Germans to see themselves as the Nazis did: as an imperiled people who had created for themselves a new lease on collective life." Like any totalitarian regime worth its salt, the Nazi government remade the competing constituencies of its nation-state into a people with a sense of historical purpose. The homeland of Herder and Hegel may have been especially ripe for this kind of cultural conditioning, but likely no more so than the Russian Empire inherited by the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany's totalitarian twin. Just as Moscow was the Third Rome in Soviet lore, the Berlin of 1933 became the center of gravity for a perversely reactionary and modern Germanic cultural awakening.

Fritzsche's observation about the Nazis' ability to create a big tent for shared resentments serves as a concise description of his masterly new book's central thesis. The Third Reich quickly asserted its grip on German society not primarily through force but instead through persuasion. The Nazis, with public policies and propaganda, convinced Germans that their regime, its ideology, and the people were one and the same. Their program presented a cultural alternative to the failed institutions of the Weimar Republic, beholden neither to the old parties of the Left nor of the Right. The Reich's agenda was steeped in a belief in the future's promise and rooted in a romantic vision of the German people's past. In this respect, the emergent National Socialist regime presented by Fritzsche seems profoundly Rousseauvian. It preached that the system could be remade for the better by reforming its institutions into reflections of the people and their shared virtues. Thus, the Third Reich won over not only the cranks but also many of the young and ambitious, regardless of their social backgrounds.

Hitler's First Hundred Days is rooted deeply in the social-history tradition. It is a story about the choices that the great majority of Germans made in early 1933. Germans chose to find hope and a sense of national belonging in the new movement, despite the flaws that many Germans saw in the likes of the despotic Hitler or the thuggish Brown Shirts. By embracing the Nazi regime, Germans were embracing a personified Reich as much as they were the Nazis themselves. Through the effective use of mass media, particularly radio broadcasts, Hitler and his cohort spoke directly and

intimately to the people, presenting them with a clear message of national inclusions and exclusions.

The Third Reich became a vessel for a set of broadly held and newly solidified cultural sensibilities. Germans were ready to work collectively on behalf of their race, a newly self-conscious people eager to pursue grand national goals. Within a few months of taking power, the Nazis had remade Germany into a nation of fellow travelers with a shared resolve against common enemies. Most notable among these enemies were Jews and Communists, whom the Nazi regime had successfully conflated into a single foreign adversary that must be destroyed both at home and abroad. By Fritzsche's estimation, which is echoed in his earlier works on Nazism, Germans demonstrated remarkable agency in their support for the regime's program, particularly the draconian policies that were instituted against Jews within weeks of Hitler's rise to power.

It is hard to imagine a scholar more qualified to write this book than Peter Fritzsche. He has written as widely and thoughtfully about the popular response to Nazism as any historian. His previous books, including *An Iron Wind: Europe Under Hitler* (2018) and *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (2009), have quickly become some of the most cited recent scholarly works on the Nazi regime. The topic of this book, with its obvious parallels to Franklin Roosevelt's first hundred days (nearly coterminous with Hitler's), could have been tackled in a ham-fisted manner. A lesser scholar might have taken the hundred-day narrative and turned this book into a blow-by-blow, compare-and-contrast study of Roosevelt's and Hitler's first three months in office. Fritzsche is too nuanced a scholar for that approach. Instead, he grounds his study in the experiences of the people living in the Third Reich. In a few discrete instances, he takes the time to lay early New Deal America alongside the emerging Third Reich. Fritzsche finds in Roosevelt's regime the ability to cultivate a sense of national purpose but not the Third Reich's thoroughgoing politics of exclusion. Nor is Fritzsche one for presentism: the name Trump blessedly does not appear in his book. While *Hitler's First Hundred Days* is laden with lessons for contemporary political observers (let alone students of any era of modern political history), Fritzsche is not a prisoner of the moment. He has instead made a substantial contribution to the historical scholarship on Nazi Germany.

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